

After Intensive Japan-based English Study:

The Response from Abroad

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Abstract

It is commonplace today for Japanese companies, particularly those with overseas branch offices or subsidiaries, to send employees overseas for up to five years at a time. Many of these foreign-bound staff require language training, which is often provided at the companies' expense in the form of a very intensive English (or other language) course. In this paper, I present the responses of Japanese professionals who are now working and living overseas to the intensive, pre-departure English courses they participated in just before departing from Japan. In most cases, the professionals involved were enrolled by their employers in short-term, ten-hour-per-day courses with native English instructors immediately prior to departure. Responses were obtained via a series of written questions (see Appendix A) and answers exchanged through email. The questions ask participants to reflect on improvement or continued deficiencies in their English since departure. For example, the questions determine which pre-departure activities have proven most useful for participants' current day-to-day life overseas, and request advice for young workers in Japan who might also be sent abroad. Results of this study suggest that participants greatly value the practice of listening skills in general, as well as those speaking activities whose purpose is to match the intonation and rhythm of native speakers (i.e., "shadow talking" or "mimicking"). Further, in consideration of the participants responses and my own experience in the English pre-departure training industry, I suggest a preferable course of action for Japanese employers who regularly send staff overseas.

Background

Japanese multinational corporations are increasingly sending professionals overseas, mainly for economic reasons. Whereas, decades in the past, Japan's heavy industry and mass-production were largely domestic, the slow-down in the Japanese economy since the 1990s combined with recent "Abenomics" stimulus efforts have accelerated Japanese investment in overseas manufacturing elsewhere in Asia ("Abenomics", 2013). Since December 2012, the weakening value of the Japanese yen

has further encouraged even greater investment in outsourced foreign manufacturing. With manufacturing shifting to overseas destinations, so too do personnel. The language of communication when staff leave Japan is most often English: as the local language (as in the USA, England, or other countries); one of the local languages frequently spoken in business (as in Malaysia or Hong Kong); or simply as the lingua-franca (as in the case of Japanese workers in continental Europe, China, or South Korea). Just as Japanese companies prefer to hire and train staff in-house, so they often prefer to supply language education to staff *in* Japan. Though there are rare occasions when large multinationals have their own language training system, the general trend is that Japanese companies look outside – but within Japan – for help. According to Monbushô's (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture) results for the 1996 fiscal year (as cited in Gordon, 1998, p.10-11), 20% of Japanese companies had a policy of providing employees with paid time “off” for outside training classes, and virtually none (about 6%) of that training was at universities or technical schools. Thus, commercial education providers, such as Japan-based language schools and language training companies, supplied 46% of employees' outside training (Monbushô, 1996). Several language-training companies offer “intensive” English pre-departure courses. The companies are in-country and provide customer-adaptable curriculum and services.

Overview of a Pre-Departure Course

The course I discuss in detail is a specific one offered by a well-established Tokyo-based language-teaching and training company. Its intensive pre-departure English training course lasts twelve days consecutively, totaling 103 instructional classroom hours. This total does not include lunch-hours, dinner-hours, or the class parties on the seventh and eleventh days of the course. As the students are strictly instructed to speak English at all times, including during meals with the teacher(s), the actual contact time between teacher and students, in an “English only” context, is roughly 125 hours¹, or an average of ten hours and twenty-four minutes a day, for twelve days. The classes are very small, consisting of no more than eight students, and often only four

¹ To put this into “CELE perspective”, a two-term Freshman English course normally consists of about 91 instructional contact hours over nine to ten months.

or five. The company divides larger groups into two classes according to English ability, thus necessitating two instructors at certain times of the year; the two classes/instructors occasionally come together in one room for activities. Because of the intensive nature of the course and the participants' diverse companies and cities of origin, an educational training center in Tokyo houses the students and instructors, both of whom move into it for the twelve-day duration. The lessons themselves are also held in the training center, in a presentation room. Sometime shortly before the start of the course, a listening and reading test, of the training company's design, is administered to all course participants. Students are thus placed in a class based on their English level as determined by this test.

A standard course schedule is presented in Figures 1 ("1st week schedule") and 2 ("2nd week schedule"). As shown in Figure 1, the course begins on a Monday afternoon. Students are instructed to start using and reusing basic English patterns for understanding ("BPUs"), such as "Excuse me" or "Can you say that again?". It is also heavily enforced upon students to use expressions showing "active listening," which means appropriate conversational responses to what others say – for example, "uh-huh", "okay", "right", "no way!", really?", etc. Classes on the first day end at 9:00pm.

On Day Two the regular pattern (9:00am to 9:00pm) is established: a morning warm-up (usually a physical warm-up) with exercises explained by each student in English, followed by ten or fifteen minutes of shadow talking (or mimicking), wherein students listen to the teacher saying something at a normal speed, and then instantly mimicking his/her speech with their own speech. This requires a great deal of concentration on the part of the students. This is followed by the morning vocabulary focus, wherein students first "teach" a partner about ten business-related vocabulary words learned the previous night (from their textbook or personal reading). Students dictate words, definitions, and examples to their partners, who must add these items to their own vocabulary books, before reciprocating and sharing their (the partners') own words in the same way. Thus, by the end of the course, each student has amassed a self-written vocabulary book of at least 100 vocabulary words. In the second part of the vocabulary focus, the teacher gives each of the partners a small card with some of the previous day's target vocabulary (taken from the primary course textbook, *Business Objectives* published by Oxford University Press), and, taking turns, the lead partner

must use paraphrasing strategies to make his/her partner “guess” the correct vocabulary words listed on the card.

Figure 1: 1st Week Schedule

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
09:00		Warm Up	Warm Up	Warm Up	Warm Up	Warm Up
		Vocabulary/ Grammar Review	Vocabulary/ Grammar Review	Vocabulary/ Grammar Review	Vocabulary/ Grammar Review	Vocabulary/ Grammar Review
		Presentation Workshop 1 I-B-C/PEELS	Current English Fluency	Building Speaking Skills Short Speeches	Current English Fluency	Building Speaking Skills Book Reports
12:30	Course Starts At 13:00	LUNCH				
13:30	Orientation Program Introduction	Reading Skills	Listening Skills	Reading Skills	Listening Skills	Reading Skills
	Building Language Skills BPUs Active Listening	Building Language Skills Meeting People	Building Language Skills Telephoning Making Contact Exchanging Information BO 2	Building Language Skills Telephoning (cont.) Making Contact Exchanging Information	Building Language Skills Companies Discussing Business Activities of Companies	Building Language Skills Exchanging Information Giving Descriptions & Explanations BO 4
	Introductions Pair Interviews	First Contact Describing Jobs	Telephone Skills Making & receiving calls Exchanging Data	BO 2 cont..	BO 3	Presentation Skills Company History
	Building Language Skills Meeting People	BO 1				
18:30	DINNER					
19:30	Group Activity Vocabulary Game	Group Activity Review	Group Activity Counseling	Group Activity Review	Group Activity Vocabulary Game	
21:00						

Figure 2: 2nd Week Schedule

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
09:00		Warm Up	Warm Up	Warm Up	Warm Up	Final Activity
		Vocabulary/ Grammar Review	Vocabulary/ Grammar Review	Vocabulary/ Grammar Review	Vocabulary/ Grammar Review	
12:30		Current English New Reports	Building Speaking Skills Short Speeches	Building Speaking Skills Book Reports	Current English New Reports	Future Study Advice
13:30		LUNCH				
		Listening Skills	Reading Skills	Listening Skills	Reading Skills	
		Building Language Skills Reporting Talking about Events in a Company's History BO 5	Building Language Skills Socializing Welcoming Guests BO 6	Building Language Skills Meetings Stating Alternatives & Recommending Action BO 7	Final Simulation Detailed Self- Introductions	
16:00	Communication Skills Opinions Agree/Disagree	Social English	Meeting Workshop Chairperson's Role Meeting Language	Telephone Skills Appointments	Final Test (AQ/RQ)	
18:30		DINNER				Final Group Activity
19:30	Communication Skills Summarizing	Group Activity Review	Group Activity Vocabulary Game	Group Activity Counseling		
21:00						

In addition, morning lessons feature workshops on speech skills. Over the entire course, each student performs four speeches alone and answers questions from the teacher and the audience. On certain mornings, students perform spoken book reports, in which they talk about the book they are currently reading or have just completed. The books are normally of the Graded Reader variety (published by Penguin or Oxford), of which various levels are available.

After lunch, each afternoon's first focus alternates between reading skills or listening skills. When reading (usually from a textbook sources such as the *Reading Power* series, published by Pearson-Longman), the instructors push students to read faster as the course progresses. Students gain instant comprehension-level feedback from checking their answers to the reading-passage questions. The course is thus designed to encourage Japanese English learners to relax their focus on accuracy in reading and to emphasize their general comprehension while reading at brisk speeds. On days when listening is the focus, students listen to professionally recorded passages on everyday subjects and test their comprehension through a short series of questions provided. After a substantial mid-afternoon break, the course shifts focus to the *Business Objectives*:

International Edition textbook. Students do small-group work, answer questions, and discuss the business issues brought up in the various chapters of this textbook.

After dinner, the students still have two hours of evening instructional time. This time is given to less curricular topics and is more relaxed in tone. Activities normally include language games (often combining two classes together to form a larger one) and free time for study or review. Each week, there is one evening designated for one-on-one counseling sessions between teachers and students. The teacher informs each student participant of his/her strengths and weaknesses and makes suggestions for the student's current and future focus. This time also allows students to express any problems or concerns they have at mid-course.

As seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2, Saturday class time ends at 6:00pm and Sunday classes do not begin until late afternoon. Following the short Sunday lesson, however, is an evening dinner and drinks social night out for all students and the instructor(s). On Monday, the course resumes its established pattern, as described above. The penultimate day of the course, Thursday of Week Two, includes a "Final Simulation", which consists of each student performing a detailed self-introduction of considerable length. In this, the students are to imagine they are meeting their overseas colleagues for the first time. They discuss their background, interests, skills and areas of expertise, and their hopes for the future at their new work location.

The course ends on Friday of Week Two. After lunch, instructors depart the training center, but students remain to retake the listening and reading test that they took just before the course began. The purpose of this, according to the Japanese administrator responsible for marketing this course, is for companies to see how participants' English abilities have improved.

Such a two-week training course, involving twelve to thirteen hours per day with a teacher, held in rented space at a Tokyo training center, is not cheap. In addition to the cost of sending staff to Tokyo (if they are not already based there) for the training, and in addition to the working hours lost by that staff being out of office for two weeks², the cost of the course for a single student is about ¥452,000. Therefore, if a given company

² The students are normally still being paid their regular salaries, by their employers, during the course.

were to enroll several staff in the course over a season, which does occasionally happen, the cost reaches the multi-millions of yen.

Student Participants

I was the teacher, for either the full course or half the course, for all the participants referred to in this study. Students in the course are Japanese, but come from diverse areas of the country and work for several different companies. I was asked not to identify any of the participating companies. However, it can be noted that most student participants work for such clients as follows: an IT provider; a subsidiary of an international Engineering/Electronics company; a Japanese conglomerate providing musical instruments, electronics, and motorcycles; a subsidiary of an Indian life insurance company; a manufacturer and marketer of engineering plastics; an automotive and aircraft technology developer; a manufacturer of automatic test equipment for the semiconductor industry, etc. Most of the students enrolled in the course are in their late 20s to early 40s. Their employers select them to go abroad because of their particular specialty that is valuable to the overseas branch/factory, *and* because of their pre-course English ability. The latter is most often determined, for the company's purposes, by the TOEIC.

Nine students who took the training course within the past two years supplied feedback; all are male. I will identify them by pseudonym based on their overseas destination, starting with those currently in the USA:

- 1) **Mr. Redwood City** (California) is in his late 30s. He works in Management Alliance with an IT provider.
- 2) **Mr. New York City** is in his 30s and is a systems analyst.
- 3) **Mr. Ohio** is in his 40s. He is an engineer designing automotive parts.
- 4) **Mr. Michigan** is about 30 years old. He is a car-door engineer.
- 5) **Mr. Illinois #1** is in his late 30s. He works in finance.
- 6) **Mr. Illinois #2** is in his late 30s. He is an academic (Ph.D. holder) technology specialist.

Three further students were not sent to the United States, and instead were sent to three diverse locations. They are as follows:

- 7) **Mr. Singapore** is in his late 30s. He is a systems engineer.
- 8) **Mr. Indonesia** is in his early 40s. He is a manager.
- 9) **Mr. Netherlands** is in his early 40s. He is a logistics assistant.

Mr. Redwood City's company gave him six months' notice that he would be moving overseas for a long period of time. Before the two-week Tokyo intensive course, he had received only ten hours of English instruction, one-on-one with a tutor. Prior to those ten hours, he had not studied English since early in university. Now in the USA, Mr. Redwood City speaks English only about half the time he is at work (otherwise he can speak in Japanese). He feels that the most important thing for Japanese professionals to study before going overseas is the phrases that English native-speakers use. He was very unfamiliar with colloquial and everyday expressions of English users, and now says he wishes he had developed his listening skills more. He says, "Most native speaker(s) can't speak slowly, even if we ask."

Mr. New York City was also given about six months' notice before his departure. He had 24 short English classes at Berlitz before starting the two-week Tokyo intensive course. Today, he speaks mostly English at work, and feels that "active listening" (small English phrases used in everyday conversation) was the most useful part of his Tokyo pre-departure training. He says today that talking on the telephone is the most difficult part of his job in America. He recommends that Japanese students focus on speaking skills before going abroad, particularly "speaking loudly and speaking what they want to say." He thinks the ability to express oneself clearly and strongly is the most important aspect of working in a foreign country.

Mr. Ohio was given eight months' notice before he was sent abroad. Before the two-week Tokyo intensive course, he had weekly English classes for about six months. Today, he speaks mainly English at work, and both Japanese and English equally when outside of work. Mr. Ohio feels that practicing being an active listener, as well as shadow talking (i.e., mimicking), was the most important part of his Tokyo English study. He says this because "English has much speed to talking." Like Mr. Redwood City, Mr. Ohio is currently most challenged by his listening ability now that he works in the USA.

Mr. Michigan was given a full year's notice before he relocated overseas. He took advantage of this time, studying English ten hours per week for a full year before the

two-week Tokyo intensive course. Today, in both his job and in his own time, he functions entirely in English. Unlike all other student respondents, Mr. Michigan thinks the vocabulary notebook assembled with classmates' help was the most useful thing he took from the Tokyo course. He is very clear in his advice for other Japanese professionals who may be sent abroad: "Study overseas. Much better than to study English in Japan." He further advises those preparing to depart: "Better talk to native speakers [a] long time. No Japanese English."

Mr. Illinois #1 was given only three months' notice that he would move to the USA. He practiced English occasionally for only one month before joining the two-week Tokyo intensive course. Today, he functions mainly in English while at work. As with Mr. Redwood City and Mr. Ohio, Mr. Illinois #1 is a proponent of practicing listening skills as much as possible. He believes that "human[s] learn from hearing." Having been abroad seven months, he says, "Now I can understand English conversation a little, so [the] next step is to speak English." He reiterates how difficult listening comprehension is for him on day-to-day basis in the workplace: "Daily conversation [is difficult]. Native [speakers] use abbreviation[s] and speak fast – like sports." Although he is improving, he says that he still "cannot catch the words."

Mr. Illinois #2 was given only forty-five days' notice that he would move the USA. Prior to the two-week Tokyo intensive course, it had been sixteen years since he had studied English. Today he functions mainly in English, in Illinois. The part of the two-week Tokyo intensive course that Mr. Illinois #2 found most useful was the active listening. In fact, he says he practices this technique every day.

The final three student participants are those sent to non-USA destinations. Each is currently in a country that is not predominantly English-speaking.

Mr. Singapore was given five months' notice that he would be moving overseas, although, unlike the others, he was able to visit his destination city briefly before moving there. Prior to the two-week Tokyo intensive course, he had experienced merely twenty hours of English lessons. Mr. Singapore's reflection on the course today is that the "English-only" environment was the most beneficial aspect of it. However, he also notes that now he is in Singapore, it is Singaporean English ("Singlish") that is most challenging for him in terms of listening comprehension.

Mr. Indonesia had seven months' notice before going overseas. Prior to the two-week Tokyo intensive course, he had experienced no English instruction for five years. He currently uses English only about half the time at work because there are several other Japanese staff at his factory, whom he helps supervise. As with some other students, Mr. Indonesia liked best the "shadow talking" (mimicking) activities in the two-week Tokyo intensive course. Mr. Indonesia's advice to Japanese who will go overseas to work is to "listen to the pronunciation of people of various countries... in order to get used to the [variety] of [pronunciations]."

Finally, Mr. Netherlands, whose story is unique. Five months in advance, he was told by his employer that he would be moving to Shanghai, China, and began to prepare accordingly. Then, two months later, he was told that his destination had changed to The Netherlands! Three months later, he moved to Europe. Prior to the two-week Tokyo intensive course, it had been twenty years since he had studied or regularly practiced English (that having been in Australia, shortly after his university graduation). Today, Mr. Netherlands speaks English and Japanese equally at work, while he speaks mostly English, some Japanese, and "a little Dutch" when away from his office. Like other students, Mr. Netherlands found the shadow talking practice in the Tokyo course most useful in preparing for his current work abroad. Mr. Netherlands – like Mr. Indonesia and, by implication, Mr. Singapore – mentions the difficulty of working with "accents and dialects" that he is unfamiliar with; i.e., the various "global Englishes"³ spoken in countries where English is not the most common language.

The administrator of the Tokyo-based course referred to in this study says that the companies which enroll students in the course are generally pleased with it. Results of this survey suggest more mixed, or at least more nuanced, responses from the students themselves, who, after relocating overseas, become immediately aware of the limitations of studying English in Japan. At the time of the survey used in this study, each student-participant had been overseas for no more than six months. Eight of the nine felt that his

³ The term "global Englishes" refers to the many and varied dialects of English spoken in different parts of the world (i.e., not only the most recognized varieties such as American and British English, but such varieties as Indian, Pakistani, Australian, and New Zealand).

overall English skills showed clear “improvement” since moving abroad.⁴ (The exception is Mr. Singapore, the student most challenged by his local non-native variety of English, who says: “Sometimes I feel my English skill is getting worse.”)

Conclusions Based on Student Responses

From the collective responses and reflections of the Tokyo English course’s nine ex-students, all currently overseas, three particular points seem salient:

(1) Shadow talking (mimicking) is perceived as a beneficial practice for Japanese who will go overseas to work in a foreign-language environment.⁵ This naturally reflects the lack of opportunity and access that busy Japanese professionals have to engage in conversation with English native speakers in meaningful, or professional, contexts. It also emphasizes the importance of the wide gap between “textbook English” and the natural rhythms, tones, and stress-patterns of everyday English.

(2) Students heading to non-English speaking countries are likely to find global Englishes very difficult. Two of the participants now in non-English speaking countries emphasize the importance of being exposed to the particular local varieties of English they will be immersed in before going overseas. This is clearly a difficult point to address in the context of language-training programs based in Japan. It would be extremely cost-ineffective, for example, for a Japanese employer, or a separate language-training company, to invest time and money in an intensive training course for *one* particular “global English”⁶, even if that particular linguistic variety was the expected one of communication for many of a given company’s overseas-bound staff. Even if such an

⁴ See Appendix : “Survey/Questionnaire Given to Student-Participants”

⁵ This point was supported by this course’s most frequent and experienced teacher, who confirmed that students respond very positively to the daily routine of Shadow Talking during the two-week Tokyo intensive course.

⁶ Nor is it easy to find, let alone train and supply regular employment to, instructors. During the period in which I worked for the Tokyo company referred to, I was asked to find a teacher of “Indian English” for select staff of one well-known Tokyo-based company. The manager was entirely unaware of the numerous regional varieties encompassed by “Indian English”, nor of the particular style spoken in the region of the country his office did business with. Despite my suggestions to the contrary, the manager insisted we search for a teacher of “Indian English”. We did eventually find and recommend two Indian teachers, neither of whom satisfied the manager. Finally, after months of futile searching, the manager decided to hire a Japanese academic affiliated with my then-company for two short lessons on “Indian English” – thus negating the entire original purpose of hiring an instructor who spoke the regional English variety that would be heard by the company staff.

ideal teacher could be found and regularly employed, it is unlikely that significant numbers of staff would have a high enough level of English fluency to benefit more from a very particular global-English course than from a non-variety-specific English course taught by a native speaker.

(3) Some students strongly recommend a focus on listening most particularly, as well as on speaking skills, for professionals facing overseas assignments.

Suggestions for Japanese Employers

From my general experience with overseas-bound Japanese professionals, my experience teaching the two-week Tokyo intensive course, and the results obtained from participants in this study, I would like to make three specific suggestions for Japanese companies that regularly send employees overseas and need to consider English training as part of that procedure:

1. TOEIC scores should not be considered a meaningful determination of staff's English ability in the context of overseas employment. While the TOEIC obviously has merit in determining English ability in a very general sense, in the context of life and work overseas, its emphasis on listening in sound bites and emphasis on reading (50%) is not a valid measurement of the English skills needed. The survey results' suggestion that conversational listening and speaking are the most important skills seems self-evident, but the availability and convenience of TOEIC continue to make it a favorite of Japanese companies. My suggestion is that, if possible, an in-house native or fluent speaker of the target language (and if possible, its particular variety relevant to the overseas posting) determine the ability of staff members. However, for companies that lack the personnel to follow this suggestion, a test may indeed be required. In that case, a speaking test (for example, the TOEIC Speaking and Writing Test, with the writing result largely disregarded; or the IELTS test Speaking Module) should be used.

2. Inform overseas-bound staff of their departure date and destination at least six months prior to departure. This again seems to follow mere common sense, and the survey results suggest that staff with more time to prepare will use that time wisely; for

example, in language study. (Likewise, it would obviously be preferable not to change the country of destination in the midst of an employee's preparation for departure.) Similarly, if a given employer does not have its own in-house language training system (my experience suggests that most do not, finding this cost-ineffective), it is preferable to let employees determine their own method of language preparation.

3. Do not engage in long-term, intensive pre-departure English study courses in Japan – instead, send staff overseas for English training. This point requires a gradual shift in attitude on the part of Japanese companies, which traditionally prefer to keep staff training matters as local and measurable (ideally, with a test-result number) as possible⁷. Much has been made in recent years of the decline in the numbers of Japanese students studying abroad, and this is in part because of the practical situation that Japanese companies prefer to train staff themselves; conversely, more Japanese professionals are being sent abroad to work. Unfortunately, the traditional corporate Japanese value of keeping training as close to home as possible appears to prevail even in matters of overseas language-preparation.

However, both in terms of cost-effectiveness and in consideration of listening and speaking skills in a world of global-Englishes, the gradual shift required may indeed occur in the future. Why?

First, in terms of cost-effectiveness, consider that the cost of sending staff overseas (airfare, moving fees, etc.) is identical whether sending them to start work immediately or sending them to study and then work. Then, consider the fee for the Tokyo-based course referred to in this study – about ¥452,000. This fee alone is, in many if not all cases, higher than that of quality foreign-based schools for a month of English study. As one example, a university-based English school I taught at in Vancouver, Canada (one of the most expensive cities in North America) currently charges about US\$3200 – \$1000 less than the two-week Tokyo intensive course – for an eight-week intensive study program with multi-national classmates and teachers speaking diverse and native Englishes. If students were to study only half of the eight weeks (about one month)

⁷ A recent Reuters article (“Abenomics encourages Japanese firms to invest abroad”, 2013) refers to Japan’s “notoriously conservative corporate boards.” A 2012 *New York Times* article discusses corporate Japan as “notoriously insular” (Tabuchi).

here, or were to study *all* eight weeks but part-time only (e.g., mornings), and if Japanese companies then spent the \$1000 now saved on staff's accommodation and meals for that same month, it would be quite possible to spend no more money than that charged for any Japan-based intensive English course. For no greater cost, students would receive a much more relevant and beneficial English experience abroad (see following paragraph), prior to starting their full-time work in the new country. The actual costs of various countries' and cities' English schools and courses available will of course vary, but it is unlikely that tuition fees for a month's study would not be significantly less than the overall cost of *any* two-week (or longer) Japan-based intensive English course.

Second, the course itself – particularly if in the same city the staff will begin work in – will act as a sort of bridge to the new country and culture, while also immediately placing the staff into a global community of English users/learners. In his study of Japanese university students, Seilhamer (2013) describes some of the conditions that contribute to the “us and them” dichotomy that “others all non-Japanese and renders Japanese membership in an imagined global community a rather incomprehensible concept” (p. 42). The same limitation naturally applies, but even more pointedly, to young Japanese professionals given short notice before long-term overseas assignments. No matter how successful the “English only” policy of a Japan-based training course, being surrounded by entirely Japanese classmates for language training is not the desirable method of preparing for overseas duty. As Seilhamer (2013) states, “Japan can ill afford maintaining the wall separating it from the rest of the world” (p.42). Responses from Japanese sent abroad suggest their awareness of the limitations of language study in Japan. Awareness of this limitation will eventually permeate corporate planning of (among other things) language study for overseas-bound staff.

A final, and logistical, benefit of companies' planning for staffs' overseas English study is that such a system ensures that minimal time elapses between language study and the actual start of employment.⁸

⁸ It sometimes occurs that a student of the Tokyo-based English course will complete the course successfully, but then face a lengthy wait – sometimes up to two months – before actually being sent overseas.

Conclusion

For overseas-bound staff of Japanese companies, I suggest that foreign language assessments be done in person by a qualified speaker of the target language, or via a speaking test, and not by the standard TOEIC. The student-participants in this study, now overseas and reflecting on their Tokyo-based intensive English course, are most enthusiastic about the value of listening and speaking (such as shadow talking) practice for Japanese professionals who will work overseas. The participants who are now in non-native English countries also emphasize the importance of being exposed to the particular variety of English a staff member will encounter. Because neither of these points can best be addressed within Japan itself, and because of the high cost of typical Japan-based English intensive training courses, I recommend that Japanese companies consider the benefit and cost-effectiveness of sending staff overseas for their intensive English training. The emerging situation faced by Japanese multinationals in the global marketplace, as well as the relative value of the yen against other currencies (especially the US dollar), will contribute to the likelihood of these suggestions becoming reality.

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Appendix

Survey/Questionnaire Given to Student-Participants

Part A

In **Part A**, please answer each question in writing (you may answer in English or in Japanese) or, where otherwise indicated, circle your choice of response:

1) What country are you currently living/working in? _____

2) What is your job in your current country? _____

3) What is your age? (please box or **highlight**;) 20s/30s -- 40s -- 50s -- 60s

4) How many months/years ago did you leave Japan to settle in your new country? _____

5) In your job, what language(s) do you function in?

English: 100% -- 75% -- 50% -- 25% -- 0%

Japanese: 100% -- 75% -- 50% -- 25% -- 0%

Other: 100% -- 75% -- 50% -- 25% -- 0%

6) Outside of your job (i.e., at home; on free days, etc.), what language(s) do you function in?

English: 100% -- 75% -- 50% -- 25% -- 0%

Japanese: 100% -- 75% -- 50% -- 25% -- 0%

Other: 100% -- 75% -- 50% -- 25% -- 0%

7) How do you rate your overall English ability at present, in terms of:

a) Speaking Ability

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5
very strong good not bad not strong enough poor

b) Listening Comprehension

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5
very strong good not bad not strong enough poor

c) Reading Comprehension

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5
very strong good not bad not strong enough poor

d) Writing skills

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5
very strong good not bad not strong enough poor

Your Comment:

8) How would you rate your overall English ability just before going overseas, in terms of:

a) Speaking Ability

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very strong good not bad not strong enough poor

b) Listening Comprehension

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very strong good not bad not strong enough poor

c) Reading Comprehension

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very strong good not bad not strong enough poor

d) Writing skills

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very strong good not bad not strong enough poor

Your Comment:



Part B

In **Part B**, the purpose is for you to evaluate the usefulness of the different parts of the English intensive course you studied in Tokyo. By “useful”, I mean **how useful it was AFTER you arrived in your new country**.

For example, although you may remember enjoying the activity itself while you were studying in Tokyo, you might now reflect that the activity did not help prepare you for your life overseas. In such a case, your answer in **Part B** would likely be ‘4’ or ‘5’.

On a scale of 1 (very useful) to 5 (not useful at all), rank the following parts of the 12-day English training course you studied in Tokyo in terms of **how useful it was after you arrived in your new country**. Please box or **highlight** one number:

9) **Active Listening** (responding correctly and in a natural way to prompts from English speakers – for example, “Really?”; “Okay”; “That’s too bad”; “Mm-Hmm”, etc.)

 1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5 
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

10) **Shadow-Talking** (speaking the English teachers' words, with the same speed and tone, as exactly as possible)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

11) **(Any) Vocabulary Exchange** (students "teach" his/her partner a series of found vocabulary words – each partner writes down the new words / part-of-speech / definition / example, verbatim, from the student's list)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

12) **(Business/Textbook) Vocabulary Cards** (partners give clues about textbook vocabulary words on cards to help each other guess/remember the correct word)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

13) **Presentation/Speech Workshops** (Speech skills; delivering short speeches, handling Q&A)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

14) **Book Reports/Graded Readers** (Students read a few of the Penguin or Oxford 'Graded Readers' on their own time, and must do oral reports to the class, about two of the texts they've read)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

15) **Reading Skills** (Timed reading and Qs – mainly from the *Reading Power* series – with the goal of increasing students' habitual reading speed)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

16) **Listening Skills** (Daily listening topics from recorded sources on everyday topics of English-culture lifestyle – usually from the *Cubic Listening* series. Recordings normally listened to four times each; students also complete questions about them while listening.)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

17) **Textbook (*Business Objectives*) Listening / Study / Activities** (Students normally do listening – in advance of the studied chapter – for homework. In class, the listening is reviewed, and the particular focus of the day is studied/practiced. These focuses, in *Business Objectives*, include: Meeting People, Telephoning, Exchanging Information, Talking about a Company, Welcoming Guests, etc.)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

18) **Individual Counseling** (Teacher meets each student, once each week, to counsel them on their strengths/weaknesses, give them study advice, etc.)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

19) **Final Presentation/Introduction** (Students do an individual self-introduction, akin to presenting themselves to their foreign colleagues for the first time *in* a foreign country.)

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5
very useful useful (undecided) not so useful not useful at all

20) Please comment on any activities from your English studies in Tokyo that you think were ***most useful*** to your current daily life/work overseas:

21) Please comment on any activities you DID NOT DO in Tokyo that you now think would have been very useful to practice for your current daily life/work overseas. (In other words, what do you **wish** you had learned/studied before coming overseas?)

22) Please comment on what aspects of using English in your current country you have found most challenging. (In other words, what parts of working/living in English are most difficult for you?)

23) What advice would you give other Japanese professionals, who are still in Japan, before they move to work in a foreign country?
